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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 078411

FOR LOS DEL

FOLLOWING REPEAT RABAT 1662 ACTION SECSTATE INFO ALGIERS
DAKAR MADRID NOUAKCHOTT PARIS TRIPOLI TUNIS COPENHAGEN
USUN 04 APR

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 1662

STATE PASS OIF/NMFS/NOAA/DOC - KRAVANJA

COPENHAGEN FOR RFA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PLOS EFIS MO SP

SUBJ: MOROCCAN NAVAL VESSEL FIRES ON SPANISH FISHING BOATS

1. SUMMARY: GOM AND SPANISH EMBASSY IN RABAT ARE
DOWNPLAYING APRIL 2 INCIDENT IN WHICH MOROCCAN PATROL CRAFT
FIRED ON SPANISH FISHING VESSELS. THEY THUS APPEAR TO WISH
TO MINIMIZE RISK, IN LIGHT OF TERRITORIAL DISPUTE, THAT
INCIDENT OF THIS KIND COULD CONTRIBUTE TO TOUGHER POSTURE ON
BOTH SIDES. END SUMMARY.

2. GOM PICKET BOAT FIRED ON TWO SPANISH FISHING VESSELS FOUR
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MILES OFF SPANISH ENCLAVE OF MELILLA APRIL 2, ACCORDING TO

SEMI-OFFICIAL MOROCCAN NEWS AGENCY REPORT APRIL 3. ITEM, WHICH CITED SPANISH NEWS AGENCIES EFE AND CIFRA AS SOURCES OF REPORT, STATED THAT NO CREW MEMBERS WERE INJURED BUT THAT ONE OF SHIPS, WHOSE CREW INCLUDES "SEVERAL MOROCCAN SAILORS," ESCAPED TO MELILLA AFTER TAKING ABOUT 40 HITS ON ITS HULL. OTHER SHIP WAS SEIZED AND CONDUCTED TO PORT OF AL HOCEIMA.

3. THIS IS FIRST SHOOTING INCIDENT IN AT LEAST TWO YEARS SINCE GOM-GOS RELATIONS STRAINED DURING "SARDINE WAR". IN MARCH 1972 MOROCCANS FIRED ON SPANISH FISHING VESSEL, WOUNDING ITS CAPTAIN. DURING ANOTHER INCIDENT IN APRIL 1973, SPANISH PLANE FIRED ON GOM WARSHIP WHICH WAS INTERCEPTING FISHING VESSEL. LATTER INCIDENT PROVOKED THE MORE SERIOUS LOCAL REACTION, BUT FURY SHORT LIVED. PRESENT INCIDENT REPORTED WITHOUT COMMENT IN SEMI-OFFICIAL AND OPPOSITION PRESS APRIL 4.

4. SPANISH EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE PRIVATELY DOWNPLAYED THE INCIDENT TO US, DISMISSING POSSIBILITY OF ANY CONNECTION WITH TERRITORIAL DISPUTE WITH MOROCCO. THEY RECOUNT EVENT AS FOLLOWS:

TWO SHIPS, ONE OF WHICH BASED IN MELILLA, WERE HAILED BY MODERN CLASS GOM PICKET WHICH TRIED TO SEIZE BOTH AT ONCE. AFTER SOME MANEUVERING, INCLUDING ABORTIVE RAMMING ATTEMPT BY PICKET, ONE OF BOATS FLED SUCCESSFULLY TOWARDS MELILLA. PICKET CAPTAIN, IN RAGE, GAVE ORDER TO FIRE, EVEN WINGING OFF A FEW ROUNDS WITH HIS OWN REVOLVER AT FLEEING SHIP. INCIDENT, MEANWHILE, WAS OBSERVED BY SPANISH ARTILLERY BATTERY ON MELILLA HEIGHTS, WHICH CALLED FOR PERMISSION TO OPEN FIRE ON GOM VESSEL. MELILLA COMMAND REFUSED, NOT WISHING TO ESCALATE AFFAIR.

5. IN SPANISH SOURCES' VIEWS, THUS, INCIDENT FALLS IN CATAGORY OF ACCIDENT OR EXCESSIVE ZEAL, BUT ONE OF THEM COMMENTED SPAIN MIGHT REACT BY SENDING WARSHIP TO MELILLA TO PROTECT FISHERMEN (SPANISH RADIO MONITORED HERE APRIL 4 SAYS MELILLA FISHERMEN UNWILLING TO SAIL IN WAKE OF INCIDENT). ANOTHER HAS ADVANCED AS POSSIBILITY THAT SHOOTING MERELY A SETTling OF ACCOUNTS BETWEEN PICKET SHIP AND FISHING BOATS, PERHAPS STEMMING FROM PAST REFUSAL TO PAY BRIBES FOR ACCESS TO MOROCCAN CLAIMED CONFIDENTIAL

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WATERS.

6. WE QUERIED MFA DIRECTOR OF EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN AFFAIRS ON SUBJECT APRIL 4. HE SAW INCIDENT PURELY IN CONTEXT OF LONGSTANDING FISHING DISPUTE WITHOUT ANY RELATIONSHIP TO MOROCCAN TERRITORIAL CAMPAIGN. HE ADDED THAT SPANISH EMBASSY HAD NOT RAISED ISSUE WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY AS YET.

7. COMMENT: BOTH GOM AND SPANISH EMBASSY, IN DOWN-
PLAYING THIS AFFAIR, APPEAR TO WISH TO MINIMIZE RISK THAT
SUCH AN INCIDENT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO TOUGHER POSTURE ON BOTH
SIDES. WE DO NOT SEE MUCH TO BE GAINED BY GOM FROM
ESCALATING PRESSURE ON ENCLAVES IN SUCH A MANNER, IN VIEW
AMONG OTHER THINGS OF SUPERIOR FIRE-POWER SPANIARDS CAN
MUSTER IN REGION AND RELATIVE SUCCESS TO DATE OF MOROCCAN
POLITICAL APPROACH ON TERRITORIAL DISPUTE. ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT
COMPLETELY EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF DELIBERATE GOM PROVOCATION,
IT SEEMS REMOTE.
NEUMANN UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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